

VZCZCXYZ0034  
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHC #3860 0442026  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
O 132010Z FEB 09  
FM SECSTATE WASHDC  
TO RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 0000  
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE 0000  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 0000  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 0000  
RUEHPS/AMEMBASSY PRISTINA IMMEDIATE 0000  
RUEHTI/AMEMBASSY TIRANA IMMEDIATE 0000  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO IMMEDIATE 0000

S E C R E T STATE 013860

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/06/2019  
TAGS: [OVIP](#) [CLINTON](#) [HILLARY](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [AL](#) [ENRG](#)  
ECON  
SUBJECT: SECRETARY'S FEBRUARY 6 MEETING WITH ALBANIAN PM  
BERISHA

Classified By: EUR A/S Dan Fried, Reason: 1.4 (b) and  
(d)

[1](#)1. (U) February 6, 2009; 11:30-12:00 p.m.; Washington,  
D.C., USA.

[1](#)2. (U) Participants:

U.S.

THE SECRETARY  
EUR-STUART JONES  
ACTING A/S PA ROBERT WOOD  
NSC-KATHERINE HELGERSON  
EUR-JERRY ISMAIL-NTKR

Albania

PRIME MINISTER BERISHA  
AMBASSADOR SALLABANDA  
DCM COLLAKU  
FIRST EMBASSY SECRETARY MISHTO

[1](#)3. (S) SUMMARY. The Secretary met Albanian Prime  
Minister  
Sali Berisha February 6. Berisha was in Washington to  
attend the National Prayer Breakfast and host a dinner  
for  
members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In a  
warm and open exchange, the Secretary expressed  
gratitude  
for Albania's support for the U.S.-led mission in  
Afghanistan, its collaboration against extremist groups,  
and its acceptance of eight Guantanamo detainees.  
Berisha  
responded the GOA would continue to play an active role  
in Afghanistan; Albania planned to send another 60  
troops  
to its mission there. The Secretary congratulated  
Albania  
on its impending accession to NATO, noting that the  
invitation to join the Alliance reflected Albania's  
reforms over the last decade. Raising concerns about  
the  
Lustration Law pending before Albania's Constitutional  
Court, the Secretary underscored that the US wanted to  
see  
Albania as a fully democratic country that respected  
independent institutions, rule of law, and promoted free  
and fair elections. The PM assured her that there was  
no  
higher priority for his government than working closely

with the opposition to promote fair and transparent elections. He pledged that the GOA would not interfere in the Constitutional Court's review of the Lustration Law. Berisha also indicated that Albania could accept a modest number of additional Guantanamo detainees and asked if the U.S. could support a new gas pipeline connecting Azerbaijan to Italy through Albania. The Secretary requested a written proposal on the pipeline initiative. END SUMMARY.

-----  
SPEAKING AS FRIENDS ABOUT DEMOCRACY  
-----

14. (C) During their thirty minute meeting in Washington, the Secretary warmly congratulated Albania on its impending NATO membership, noting that the invitation to join the Alliance reflected significant reform steps the GOA had taken over the last decade. As a friend of Albania, the Secretary urged the PM to redouble his efforts to promote Albania as a fully democratic country that respected independent institutions and the rule of law. Emphasizing that June's parliamentary elections would be a visible indicator of Albania's democratic maturity, the Secretary signaled anything other than free and fair elections would be an embarrassment for Albania and all its supporters.

15. (C) Berisha assured the Secretary that there was nothing more vital to his government than holding free and fair elections. Although there were some technical flaws, international observers characterized Albania's 2007 local elections as fair and credible. Through close collaboration with the opposition Socialist Party, Albania was able to amend the electoral code, establish a bipartisan elections committee, and complete digitization of voter rolls. The government also began issuing biometric national ID cards and passports to ensure a transparent vote that will reflect the will of the people. He welcomed additional US and international monitors to ensure June's elections met international standards.

16. (C) The Secretary sought the PM's commitment to respect the rule of law as Albania deliberates over the adoption of the anti-Communist Lustration Law. Berisha noted that Albania had a lustration law on its books in 1995, but the opposition party abrogated it the following year. A new law was necessary, he said, to remove officials from the communist era who have burrowed into high government office. He blamed the opposition for failing to cooperate on the bill, claiming that it abandoned the drafting process in June after two years of negotiations.

17. (C) Berisha acknowledged that appeals of the Lustration Law were pending before the Constitutional Court and assured the Secretary that his government would not interfere with the Court's review process. He added that the GOA would only "use legal and legislative means" to address defects the Court identified. The PM said he was troubled that four members of the Constitutional Court were "tainted" by their own Communist-era service and that Albania lacked the clear conflict of interest standards

that the US and EU have. While he would respect the decision of the Constitutional Court, even if the four judges did not recuse themselves, he held out the possibility of appealing the Constitutional Court's ruling to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

-----  
IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN, KOSOVO and GUANTANAMO BAY  
-----

¶8. (C) Thanking Berisha for Albania's contributions to US efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as its valuable role in promoting Kosovo independence, the Secretary said she was convinced that Albania would make a strong new NATO Ally. The Secretary also expressed the USG's appreciation for Albania's decision to accept eight former Guantanamo detainees. Berisha noted his government had maintained its presence in Iraq as long as it could but the GOI had terminated its mandate in December. Albania would continue supporting coalition needs by sending an additional contingent of 60 soldiers to Afghanistan.

¶9. (S) Labeling the facility as the wrong symbol for America, Berisha welcomed the decision to close the Guantanamo detention facility. To facilitate the process, he offered to accept a modest number of additional detainees in Albania, as long as they were not Uighur. GOA acceptance of Uighurs had nearly severed Albania's relations with China, he said, and the GOA could not risk another confrontation with Beijing.

-----  
CORRUPTION, ECONOMIC REFORM AND INVESTMENT  
-----

¶10. (SBU) The PM underscored his government's commitment to fighting organized crime and public corruption and stressed Albania had developed strong working relations with neighboring law enforcement agencies. GOA efforts had led to the prosecution of hundreds of organized crime figures. Berisha also pledged to continue strengthening conflict of interest rules for public sector employees.

¶11. (SBU) PM Berisha extolled the benefit of U.S. assistance. USAID and Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) projects to reform the GOA's revenue collection arm had helped the government realize revenue growth of 22% annually over the last three years. The GOA has been able to collect \$3.2 billion more in revenue over the past three years even as tax rates have declined. The US assistance programs also saved taxpayers \$500 million in administrative costs. And thanks to US programs, new businesses can register in one day for virtually no cost.

¶12. (SBU) Noting Russian attempts to dominate the Balkans energy market, Berisha asked if the U.S. could support a new gas pipeline that would connect Azerbaijan with Italy running through Albania. His preliminary discussions with Italian and Turkish leaders indicated some interest, although he acknowledged there was some hesitation due to downward pressure the plan would have on gas prices. The Secretary requested that the GOA provide the Department

with additional details on the proposal.  
CLINTON